

THE GRIEVING PART

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hi,

this one kind of is.....

y'know.....

lol!

1. Ricky Pendergast

There was once a 10th grader
Named Ricky Pendergast

Ricky Pendergast had been struggling very much in high school,
He felt like every class he went into he was looked at as some odd thing.

He didn't know why he felt like this.
He had....friends?
He felt like he could name a few people he could call "friends"

But no one....
Well, no one who spontaneously invited him over on the weekends
Or who invited him out to the beach late on Friday nights
No group that he belonged to,

And whenever there would be some grand hangout
(Of 10th grader fashion)
((So, like a kickback or something hahahahaha))
He would seem to be just outside of the range of closeness to be invited

Why?
ricky asked
Is there something I could do so that people would just like me? like, so that everyone would
just fuckin' like me?

Well yeah.
his uncle responded
'f Course there is.

W....what? what do you mean.
ricky said, feeling very taken aback

and his uncle began,
ricky, Every person who doesn't love you -- who **can't**, see, who **chooses** that they can't love
you mmmm....Every one of those S O B's has got a version of you in their head....see? a
version of you in their head that they think you **ought** to be. A version they consider your best,
which really just means the version of you that would suit **them** the most, that would satisfy
them the most....And they've simply decided to not let go of that idea. They've just decided,
see, that they have you figured out, figured out how you *should* act....in a way that

would....maximize your potentialuhhhh.....**That** would make them a good person, They'd think to themselves.....*if only they acted **this** way.....that would be good.....*so, SURE heh, if you acted *exactly* as everybody secretly **wanted** you to. Read every person's mind and then molded yourself exactly to please every person's selfish expectation of you? Then, shoo, yeah, yu'd probably be the town favorite! BAHA!

and ricky's uncle really,
just
laughed at that one

really just laughed
in his large leather chair
with a glass in his hand
and years of loneliness in-between his eyebrows.

and ricky sat
with eyes agape
having seen into some closet he wasn't supposed to.

But yuh can't do that, Ricky!
his uncle continued.

That's the way a **fool** lives. Trynna please every'un around them? What on earth did **they** do to deserve so much of **your** spirit? You see? Of your **time**? Nuthin. That's the real answer – they didn't do nuthin' to deserve that much of your energy. Of yur **spirit**, you see? that's yours. Ain't matter if the whole world couldn't give ya the time of day, no one can **ever** take that from you.

Ricky's uncle said all this
With one long and boney pointer finger outstretched
And his lower lip plopped slightly out
He sat back in his chair.

Yur time is what you got. And ya give things value by how much of your time you put into 'em. Someone said that once. Shoot, **lots** of people have been saying that for a looong time I think heh. Do yuh understand what I'm sayin' here, Ricky?

And Ricky felt like he understood too much.

Had understood absolutely every word that had fallen out of his uncle's mouth.

With crystal clarity.

With a clarity crisper than cracked ice.

Felt like the windshield of his reality had been wiped clean.

And for the first time.

Saw....

EveRythiNg.

He saw everything.

The inner workings.

The equations.

The...The

Ricky?

his uncle asked again

Ricky had been gazing at his own hands
With those wide, agape eyes
With eyes that had learned.

He looked up at his uncle
Who looked down at him with his head cocked
Looking down on him
So that he was in the shape of some chicken.
Some tall chicken.

Yeah.

ricky said, plainly

Yeah, I.....Yeah

he had no more words to say
nothing more....
nothing more

ricky understood something very different than what his uncle
had intended him to understand....
what his uncle would go back home thinking he understood...

See,
Ricky's uncle felt very surely that he had given his nephew a piece of wonderful advice for
strength
For self-love, really

And, to be fair,
Ricky's uncle *had* shared with his nephew
A piece of advice that had really helped him so very much in his own life
A piece of advice that, when he had picked up,
Really changed him
Really made him realize his imperfect and glorious worth.

But,

Ricky's uncle learned this lesson when he was 28
And Ricky was 16
...So
Different
Lessons were
Conveyed. And

Now,
Everytime Ricky sat in a classroom
Or on the blacktop at lunch
When he'd see the people
Who'd walk around him
Talk to him
Or even were in his school's clubs with him

Ricky could **only** think,

there's someone (1)you want me to be

there's someone (2)you want me to be

there's someone (3)you want me to be

who's that like?

there's someone (4)you want me to be

*and there's even someone who (5)you want me
to be*

*and if i only knew
who that me was.....
who they all were.....*

then i could just be it

and you'd all...like me?

mathematically..

i really could..

*i mean you'd all just
have to like me?
just like.....that?*

And this habitual thought
Became so commonplace for Ricky
That even when,
as months
and years passed,
and Ricky would find himself in situations with people who really enjoyed his company

friends at bowling alleys, joking in class, playing basketball,
even under string lights with a boy he found very cute

Ricky could still
only think

*am i just
being the you
that you want me to be?*

*and if i wasn't being this me,
wouldn't you
just*

*walk away?
leave me?*

Which gnawed at Ricky's pleasure in socializing.

So much so,

That by the time he was 19

He had refused to let anyone into his intimacy

Unless he felt like

He could change his entire identity overnight

Every single one of his values and virtues

And this person's love for him would be **completely** unchanged.

Unfazed.

So....

Ricky didn't have....uhhhhh

much....intimacy at all....really

for like.....

yeah, for like a while.....

until he was 24

which was the first time

someone saw him with eyes that wanted

but that wanted softly

wanted with a heart that had matured,

and had grown up a few times

when someone with those eyes
saw him
and said,

*...i like you the way you are, yeah?
and like,
yeah, if you changed, like
maybe my like for you would also change.
if it didn't
i'm pretty sure i'd just be like, worshiping you?
like a god? hahahaha
which is like
yeah that's like hahahaha
kinda fucked*

And this happened to be said to Ricky
While he was stoned
And also 24.

so,
ricky laughed
actually

laughed at how ridiculous his own philosophy sounded coming out of this boy's mouth!
how clearly....
ridiculous!!! it sounded
and,
ricky

had another moment
where he felt like he **understood**

but this time
it didn't feel like....
too much

it didn't feel like he was seeing something he wasn't supposed to be seeing
but.....more like
realizing the sweater on the chair in the middle of the night isn't a scary gargoyle
that it's just a sweater....

and that night ricky and the boy kissed each other with their tongues

and they scrolled through memes together
laughing
laughing
gosh, they were laughing
and they made a huge batch of pasta
and both ate far too much.
laughing
eventually started kissing again
but
stopped because ricky wanted to go slow
and the other boy was a kind one who was in no rush
and so they kept talking
with grins
and glistening eyes
and giggly toes that
tapped on each other
like windchimes

and
ricky went back home to his own apartment
the next morning.

and
the air tasted like ice water
and the dogs walking with owners looked like beautiful paintings
and the playground,
was the sweetest music
and even his own room,
was warmer

and he sat there.
on this worn mattress
this resting place he knew so well
with skin that had always felt so tight on his bones
now felt bound by loose lace
with a spaciousness so permeable
it felt as if all the world's warmth could pass in and out of him in an instant
like pure radiance.

and ricky pendergast enjoyed this feeling
the whole morning
ricky pendergast just enjoyed

this feeling
quite a lot
and then
he took a nap.

and then
woke up

some time later
in the afternoon

with the sun
quietly shimmering across the floor and walls of his room

and ricky
pendergast
felt distinctly
as though he was in-between things

felt as though this place
and this moment
was certainly not a dream
but **was** certainly
not the reality he was familiar with

so what of that?

ricky thought to himself

where am i?

he thought to himself

he didn't even realize
the answer
fall from his lips

happy?

2. i miss you

*and so,
they were in a garden.*

*the two of them,
together*

*were together,
in the garden*

*there, they spent all the time
they could have ever hoped to spend with each other*

*they relaxed,
and laughed*

*shared all the secrets they had
always talked about sharing*

*they got lost in their love for each other
because they were in the garden together*

*and the rest of the world
seemed so misguided*

*when they were in this garden
together.*

*“why doesn’t everyone just do this?”
“lie down in a garden with someone they love?”*

why didn't everyone?

why didn't everyone.....

just lie down in a

garden with someone they love?

....

....

....

....

....oh

....right

....

....

and then....

sigh

and then one of the two of them
just sorta

got up.

yeah.....

and walked **out** of the garden

.....walked.....

sigh.....

idk, somewhere else.

*and the **other** one*

*who was **still** there*

*felt now so **stupidly** aware*

*of **why** everyone doesn't just lie down in a garden
with someone they.....*

because now

this garden

felt moldy.

*because This was their garden
This was the place
where everything felt like
"why isn't everyone doing this?"
This was the place
that felt like
The Answer*

*and now
This Place felt moldy.
The Place that felt like The Answer
was now mold.*

*and can i tell you another
reason it sucked so bad?
the real Greek aspect of it all?*

*is that neither person felt like they were the one who actually got up and left the garden
each felt like it was the **other** person who had gotten up and left*

*...even though there
like,
was one who*

*did just objectively
get up and just like,
leave.....*

whatever,

*now,
they **both**
felt alone
in a garden of*

*pff
idk*

memories or some shit....

*what even was in the garden at this point?
just shadows?
is there anything solid here anymore?
any seedling that isn't just
some twisted sprout of an old nostalgia?
is there anything here that isn't just a fucking empty shadow.*

.....

*even still,
if it was true that neither of them had really left
then were both of them just wandering around the same beautiful garden
with mold over their eyes....?
blind to the other's presence?*

*is that still?...
some semblance of togetherness?
is that still?...
some type of connection?*

*can't they still be....?
in a garden together?.....*

3. the Jazz Ant

There's a colony of ants
 that live in a bathroom
 in a house on the island of Kauai
 They have swarmed the bathroom's toilet.

on the seat
 and under,
 even on the lever to flush.

and because this house has 2 bathrooms,
 the two humans living there decided simply to never use *that* bathroom
 "leave it to the ants"
 they joked,
 and so
 the ants lived in relative peace.

but
 this colony of ants,
 does have
 this *one* ant
 who just
 can't stop
 singing jazz.

it's marvelous, really
 how this ant
 in a colony on Kauai
 was able to even hear jazz
 let alone feel it intimately enough to be able to recreate it
 to be able to improvise it!

but,
 ya know
 she's an ant.

and it is not marvelous to ants
 when another ant is constantly singing jazz
 it is,
 in fact,
 rather
 obtrusive

strange
 mutated
 misguided
 distracting
 convoluted
 and weird

but this judgment
 that the colony felt for the jazz ant
 never pushed any individual
 to kill
 this jazzy ant
 or even to expel her from the colony
 just enough for them to be cold to her.

and so,
 every morning
 when the ants soldiered on their way
 over to that toilet,
 beginning their uniform scavenging routines

the Jazz Ant, see
 began to wander off in zig zags

beginning,
 her own day

of extrapolated nonsense

of marvelous misguidedness

purely improvisational nonsense

and whenever another ant passed her by
 they tried their hardest not to present that they could even hear her

pretending to be so focused on whatever
 they're lugging
 that they "just didn't even notice you!"

and this is how the colony got along
for very long
until the Jazz Ant got very old, in fact

who still kept on improvising.
even in her decay of body.....

and yes,
to anyone truly steeped in jazz
they would recognize that this ant
had evolved into having quite a sophisticated mastery of this musical style
expanded upon it, even
expanded upon it so far that humans themselves would have learned many things just by
listening
to Jazz Ant.

but no one *was* there to tell her that
because the owners of this house never went into that bathroom
and because none of the *ants* knew jazz
none of the other ants found *any* strength
in what she found life in.

and so
as she entered into her ancient years,
the colony was just beginning to hear her disruption as **part** of *their* music.

this is not to say the ants were enjoying her
or her jazz
she was still treated as an oddity
and if you asked any one of them,
every ant would tell you just how annoyed they were
by that "darn Jazz Ant."

but in an unconscious contamination of thought,
she had become *their* odd Jazz Ant
she had indeed settled into some strange place in the family
even if on the outskirts

and centuries later
 when the humans were all but ash
 and this world made only the sounds
 of scuttering scavengers.....

the colony still thrived.

around an eroding toilet bowl
 and would tell stories

of some....excitement
 that once existed
 within this colony
 some **extraordinary** strangeness

and the ants as a collective loved this story
 so much
 it would even be used
 as a transition out of awkward pauses of silence

"kinda crazy how we once had that ant that sang gibberish all the time, huh?"

and whatever ants were in that awkward silence
 would say things like "hmmmm" and "gosh" and "oh yeahhh"
 and these were genuine exclamations of awe
 all the ants floating into some deep, philosophical introversion for a few moments.

.....

when did the colony
become capable of philosophy?
how did they become capable of dreaming?
of nostalgia?
was it really just that one guy?
was it how they all treated her?

when did the colony go from
despising her
to treasuring her?

there doesn't seem to be a clear day,
there doesn't even seem to be a first time one of the ants loved her

but if you were able to see
all of the ant colonies in the world
this one,
now in a world of ash
this one was one that was the most dream-filled.....
and *that*.....

....

...

....

that
has to count

.....

for something

....

.....

, right?

4. the hairy guy.

*remember those kids?
those kids that walked to school together?*

there were 4 of them.....

i can't remember their names....

*but i remember a color each of them usually wore.....
idk why.....*

uhhhh.....

*yellow
red
black
gold ?*

*gold's pretty similar to yellow....
but the names sound different....
plus this gold thing was like **gold** it was very much **not**.....yellow....
i'm getting carried away, sorry.....
memory sessions'll do that to me*

okay,

so

the 4 kids

Gold, Yellow, Red, and Black would walk to school
Every single day

And on their path a garden lay
A floral wonderpatch

But in the green
There was a sheen
A beast named tales of old

Great, big
Monster
lived there.

It had white hair
Long white hair
That fell down to the grass
Hair of such volume
It concealed any outline of legs or body

The monster was huge
The size of 20 kids piled onto each other
Maybe even bigger....
Maybe he was just sitting....
Maybe if he stood he'd double in size...
No one had ever really seen him move
At least Yellow hadn't
Because she asked,

you ever seen the hairy guy move? run? walk?

And the group laughed
Quietly
To themselves
Stalling on what to say
Yellow was the youngest of their 4
So they had to teach her right.

*i once heard it run through the streets,
the vibrations from its footsteps made the whole city's
car alarms go off
dogs were barkin' for days*

*i once heard it's kept tame
by being fed by our parents
sacrifices of cows or goats
and i heard he eats 'em in a swallow
like it's nothing.*

*jaw opens up like a whale shark, is what i know
and he has 3 sets of retractable teeth*

3?!
this was yellow again.

*yup 3.
but it can retract them if it wants to swallow larger objects*

*or to appear more docile.
this was red.*

*whaddya mean?
why would it want to appear docile?*

so it can lure.

lure???? lure what????

*it lures.
kids.*

like us kinda kids??

*just like us kinda kids
it lures them in with song.
enchanted song
before you're close enough, it
makes its appearance look
as harmless as possible
and once you're close enough,
they say its eyes have a
hypnotic quality
that once you look in you can't leave
and then he just
eats you.
and you let him.
he just picks you up and just
eats you.
just like that.
and you just sit there
and you just let him do it*

*W..
WHAT*

red nodded her head.

*there are tons of kids who've
been lost to him.
keep your distance.*

and yellow did.
she did
she did
she did

for a while....

but

slowly

on the walk passed the garden

she'd started to hear

a whistling tune....

something sweet.....

something that she knew was the giant the first time she heard it
despite it sounding far sweeter than the hideous of the monster the group had described
yellow just knew

but, with her friends' voices in her ears,
 she muffled it out
 and heard it as just a passing tune
 like walking by a store with tv's in the window.....
 just one of the sounds on the school walk....

and that worked.....

.....

for a while.....

until yellow
 found herself humming the tune while alone in her bed,
 and then singing something all her own, yet inspired by the melody,
 then thinking about where the beast's song *could* go next,
 and what the beast looked like when he sang it,

was he expressive?
 did he have an expressive face when he sang?
 or was he a more concerned and focused singer?

and then on the school walks,
 she found herself drifting into silence
 right as they'd pass by the garden
 she'd turn her head,
 trying to catch a glimpse
 of the singer itself

but she never could.
 all she could see was the top of its head
 white fur rising and falling like the waves
 body tucked behind rows of bushels and trees

and then,
the moon was full.

and Yellow lay awake
in her bed
gazing out the window

somehow positive
she could hear its song
through the glass
and down the blocks.

she swore she heard it
and she swore it didn't sound scary

and with no one else's words in her head

she snuck out.

creeping through the neighborhood nighttime
it sounded like midnight, but felt like noon.

and suddenly she was standing,

at the garden's edge.

daytime
on her walks.

the song was different
than what she would hear in the

only slightly,

slightly louder

slightly more explorative

slightly more dangerous

that word

dangerous.

singed at yellow's fingertips

and made her heart whine

but not cower

this was not that kind of danger

she began to walk closer

through the garden

dripping into music

swallowing your before

the licks and lilt of a nighttime wondersong

dancing around your head

like ribbon

like sheet music risen up from the page

*you notice the birds
there are birds slipping around you*

*birds of kaleidoscopic colors
strange birds
strange sounds*

jungles and deserts and snowflakes and mountains....

*you hear the song so close
loud
you hear that it really....*

whatever it's coming out of

is big.

woah.

yellow stopped
for the first time since entering the garden
the magnitude of the sound made it far less calming than it had been before
this sounded much realer

much stronger
it made her whole body vibrate
like being up close to a concert amp.

the song stopped,

so did the birds.
all that can be heard are the crickets beyond the garden
but within?
the air was still
it was anticipation.

she didn't know why she did it but
yellow walked through the last row of branches

he was big.
draped in white hair
that unfurled onto the grass
pooled itself into knots
no figure of any body part could be seen
behind the cloak
only its

he was beautiful.

eyes.....

*his eyes were rubies
they were small,
concise,
condensed,
reflective,
honest,
pure,
beautiful,
radiant,
thin,
shallow,
glass-y,
tormented,
scared,
and unbelievably
human.*

the hairy giant and the yellow-socked girl looked at each other

the birds had not started up again
but the dragonflies and fireflies *had* begun floating once more
so in this sea of gliding stars.....

the two of them looked
 beautiful in the moonlight

they all did....

yellow remembered the stories of kids being eaten
 remembered the monster's mouth unhinging
 where was its mouth?
 oh god it had worked, she thought
 oh my god i'm hypnotized

and her whole body fell towards a sprint

but was
 stopped
 by a tone.
 single,
 softer,
 and quieter.

the creature's eyes were closed
 and held this tone for a very few moments
 sounding like stones skipping across a pond
 like the alarm bells to the solar system

the tone whispered to a silence
 and the creature opened its eyes to look at yellow
 frozen in mid-flight

looked in a way to ask,
 to make sure,
 " quiet enough? "

yellow fell again,
 this time into a smile
 as she nodded her head and
 her body softened to a kneel

the creature smiled too

closed its eyes,
and began to sing.

SUDDENLY!!! IN THE MIDDLE OF YOU READING ALL THESE STORIES!!!!

:)

5. an interlude of introversion

A HOLE OPENS UP ABOVE YOU

JUST, SOME SORT OF SPECTRAL HOLE

AND THROUGH THE HOLE

FLOATS

AIMLESSLY

AN ANGEL!

IT LOOKS JUST LIKE AN ANGEL

AND NO NO, NOT LIKE "AN ANGEL"

IT LOOKS LIKE **AN ANGEL.**

RIGHT!?!?

AN ANGEL!!!!

IT FLOATS INTO YOUR ROOM

AND IS UH.....A LITTLE UNBALANCED HONESTLY

OH!

OH

HAHAHAHAHA

IT'S HIGH!!!!

ITS EYES ARE A LITTLE DROOPY AND DEFINITELY RED

OMG IT'S DEFINITELY LIKE, TOO HIGH

BUT DON'T UHHH

DON'T LET IT KNOW THAT YOU KNOW

I DON'T THINK IT WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT
 THEY MIGHT GET REALLY SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT IT

heyyyy, what's goin' on?

just wanted to swing by

, you guys just all seem to be uh

like

FREAKING out about everything

....hahahaha

well not really

it's just.....

yeah like,

i know there's a MILLION things to like, "fix"

like things you need to um.....

like fix! you know like hate and you're

trying to solve hate which is.....

valiant.

but.

.....yeah i've just been seeing you guys, like

really

*like going **in** on yourselves?*

really being like.....

kinda mean to yourselves.....

just about how you're like

living?

and

feeling?

and like

whether or not you have enough strength

to make breakfast one morning?

or how

long you feel heartbroken

or lost

for?

idk

like things that in and of THEMSELVES are like, not a good time haha

and yeah, like THOSE are the times you're hardest on urselves....?

*i think cause u think the most change needs to happen like,
if things are really bad then like something's gotta CHANGE*

which,

yeah

is valiant.

but,

sometimes there aren't

things to change, you know?

or at least no things that YOU can change

and,

trust me

everything

has things that they can't change.

there is something above everything....

you guys have gotten really good at fooling yourselves otherwise though haha.....

the angel floated into sitting on top of that wooden dresser you have
they're really seeming to get settled into ur room

it's sweet :)
it's trust

and so i'm just kinda worried about you guys, i don't know

i like you guys....

i like, LOVE you guys....

idk why about that one

*i just really want you
to be nice*

to urselves.....

idk.....

....

and i think the angel did have more to say
not a ton more
they got out what they *really* needed to.
but i think, in private, they'd tell you they had more they wanted to say
but
hahahahaha
no joke?
they were too high and started getting anxious and paranoid.
started thinking about how you're perceiving them

and how they're also an angel.
and you're also a human.

and they didn't know if any angel had actually ever been *seen* by a human before
so uhh
they started feeling like they might be currently causing a cosmically large event

so
 they uhhh
 just lifted their head towards you
 smiling
 seeing you
 mf'ing BUG-EYEING them hahahahahaha

cause this **angel's** just been MONOLOGUING at you so of **course** you're like 🙄

hahahahaha

and so,
 they just slowly
 drifted back up
 into the hole,
 pretty awkwardly really
 it was a pretty awkward moment
 in your room
 with an angel.

and as they
 floated through the hole
 the sides of the hole
 folded over each other
 like how a
 grandmother folds a picnic blanket
 and the creases somehow just seemed to flatten themselves out,
 and the hole was gone.
 and any traces of it had totally vanished.

and it was just

you

again.

and you took the time you needed to
 scoffed, shaking your head,
 thinking,
 "damn, mercury's gotta be in retrograde 'er some shit"

and then
 you kept reading.

6. "I am the sun."

there was this boy,
 this young boy
 young boy with dark skin
 who was sitting on a beach
 by himself.

up in Northern California
 not very close to the house he lived in
 the college house he shared
 with 4 other boys

Magic,
 {which was the boy's name}
 {i know, i know,
 he had really cool parents}
 had been coming out here
 pretty frequently this last month.
 he had started feeling a spiritual significance with this place

3 weeks ago his mom died
 in a freak accident
 where a Trader Joe's roof collapsed
 killing 31 people
 magic's mom being one of them.

and in other times,
 magic wouldn't really
 consider himself
 a very spiritual person
 but everything magic thought he
 knew about evrythng
 had essentially been lit on fire
 in these last three weeks

nothing felt real.
 no truths felt true.
 all answers seemed.
 to lead to.
 the same.
 bottomless darkness.
 the same.
 bottomless questions.

so,
 magic feeling a little more spiritual than normal
 finding some spiritual significance in some place by his house
 he'd otherwise overlook
 was nowhere near the strangest thing in his life

magic longed for the day when him feeling like a weirdo was the biggest anxiety he had.

god i would kill

to get to just be weird again.

and at
 that moment.

as magic was dripping a fistful of sand
 onto his right knee,
 the sand
 began falling
 with
 extreme
 slowness.

parachuting through hardening cement.

magic saw
 and stared at it

eyes squinted
 eyebrows furrowed
 he turned his head to the right,

but his head left a trail of heads as it moved
 and magic felt all of them as his own

a moment where his head existed in many places at once
and those other heads evaporated away
after-images that remained only for a few seconds

ugh, alright, what the fuck is this

magic saw
 raindrops falling ever so slowly,
he hadn't even noticed it was raining until now.

he looked over to his left
head-tracers disorienting him along the way

and to his left he could see the waves

well,

A wave
near the shore,

having just completed its rise up
it had just begun its crash
but collapsing ever so slowly it looked almost frozen.

so magic looked up,
above him.
and
when the warping of his heads receded
magic saw,
a bolt of lightning.

directly above him.
moving,
down towards him
very
slowly.

but certainly faster than everything else he'd looked at
 even faster than the rain falling next to it

so, magic started feeling pretty fucking SCARED
 (obvi)

but even his heart,
 which only wanted so desperately to start racing

was too slow
 to expel even a thump.

magic was suspended in this experience,
 alone.
 without even his body

without even....
 his body

so magic
 looked back to his right
 and saw
now,
 someone who was sitting next to him
 someone who looked very human
 but not someone magic had ever seen before

they looked really androgynous,
 magic couldn't guess what gender they were
 which magic actually liked better when meeting
 new people.

they had dark skin too
 not dark like his,
 theirs was a little lighter
 and a little....warmer?
 and they had really thin, really shiny black hair that
 only fell to their forehead.

and they were looking up at the lightning too.

uhhh hey?

(^magic^)

you're talkin' to me?

(^stranger^)

*obviously,
who are you?*

oh, gosh uh

i dunno.....

i think i'm just me?

who are you?

uhhhh

*i don't know, man
my name's magic*

woah, cool name

but magic was
so accustomed to this compliment
– having a name like magic
that he had made a habit
of just not responding at all
when it's said

*dude what's this
lightning doing?*

oh uhhhhh yeah

*well it looks like it's
heading for you*

y...yeah

*why is it
why's it doing that?*

o, you mean like the physics of it?

i mean like am i about to die?

*oh.....that.....i do....
yes, you're about to die.*

they both stayed quiet for a second.

*did you....
are you real?*

*definitely.
yeah, definitely
but no one ever thinks i am at first
so your suspicion is not like,
a-typical, is what i'm saying*

are you like here for me?

*huh.....maybe....
i guess the only other option is i'm here for me,*

*but
but did you....
did you choose to be here?
did you.....*

*uh....no i don't think so
i'm just kinda tossed around like this*

*wait – you've – ?
have you been in a situation
like this before?*

*i mean –
uh, this is kind of the only situation i've ever
been in.*

*i'm sucked to one person who's
about to die
and then when they...die
i'm just sucked over to another person
who's about to die
and then just....so on*

*holy shit
what?
this is....
i'm gonna **die**?*

.....yeah

you're sure?

*the other person
just looked up
and,
then magic looked back up
the lightning shooting off thin little roots
as it unfurled towards their spot on the beach*

yeah.....

*that's....
really coming for me?*

....it looks that way, yeah

*holy shit.....
why?*

*god i don't know
i don't think there's a reason*

*w – well why are you
why the fuck are you
why is it not....
why....are you not.....*

magic looked at their person
who was now looking back at them
wordless, confused too

and they were quiet again.

magic looked down
at the sand this time

*has anyone ever been able to
like avoid it? get out of it?*

....no

*damn
.....
damn.*

*damn, that's kind of fucked up that you have to just
like, watch it
over and over.....*

do you like serve god? are you an angel?

*oh i don't serve....
well if i do i've never met them
this is all i know
there's not like....
i don't converse with the
power above me.....
which is the distinct characteristic
humans seem to have
about angels
but.....
no, i don't get answers.
same as you.*

*how long
you been at this?*

*oh god
how long?
.....um*

magic recognized the grief
recognized the shatter in their inhale

sorry. don't. don't worry about it.

there was quiet again,
both looked back
up at the crawling death

can you....

am i allowed to ask you....
are you allowed to --

the stranger took magic's hand in theirs

magic felt shock,
relief,
care
and then started crying.

but it was still too slow.

no tears fell
his heart just wept to breathe.
to heave
and his tears longed to fall

he just tried
focusing on the present moment
tried meditating, essentially
because that mindset and practice
had been really helping him
through these last few weeks
so he shut his eyes
and

heard
!
the waves
the waves?
he didn't know how

but he didn't want to open his eyes anymore
didn't want to explain away the illusion.

so he just heard the waves

and felt
 the hand
 wrapped around his own
 and....
 smiled?
 jesus....

and the lightning kissed the top of magic's head

raced through every hollow bone and open vein
 every muscular tissue
 every pocket of marrow

electricity shuffling its way down every avenue
 eyes flipping open in extraordinariness,
 his fingertips had become eccentricism,
 they had become rockets.

there was no pain, but there was no comfort
 and despite the
 overwhelming sensation
 the unbelievable
 accumulation of feeling
 his mind was echoing a single phrase

"I am the sun."

with lightning through him,
 with waves around him,
 he felt the centerness of his purest essence,
 in the middle of all things
 being observed
 by the quantum world
 as pure royalty

and then he had his next thought.

“how futile all that. feels now”

“how. whole i feel now”

“what does. *that* mean?”

“am i. alive?”

and then the lightning struck the sand
and a boom rang out.

and wherever in this universe his mom was
magic was now there.

the event startled very much the closest person,

which was a light-skinned man in his 50's
who was asleep in a public bathroom
5000 feet away

who,
shocked awake from his unexpected daytime rest
still between
his dream and reality
grumbled only one word
before falling right back in,

LUNATICS.

7. Cloud's tale

we were over florida.

like,

uhhhh

600? feet off the coast of South Beach

(which is in Miami).

it wasn't a cloudy day at all,
there were purely blue skies
everywhere,

but

in this one spot

due to scientific reactions far too complicated for this writer to list out or know
a cloud formed.

it was

really frail

and

in fact,

almost skeletal

it just

drifted

into a floating existence

huh?

it thought.

and it wasn't sure
where to go
after that.

huh?
what?

andthen,,,

woah

its backside was

all of the sudden,
disappearing.

wait

wait

it was already half the size it was 5 seconds ago

it was being

blown.

it was feeling wind

but did not yet know that was the name

of the thing dissolving its body away

but its body *was* dissolving

and it *could* feel that.

its body now only a quarter
of its 10-second-ago size

hmm....

and the wind blew hard

and the cloud

with only a drop of its head left

looked down

and saw

this....

blue?

blue....

wow

it wrinkled like
like.....

well the cloud didn't know!
cloud didn't have anything to make a simile out of

but it saw this....blue

and it wrinkled....

and it....

oh!

oh!

and the cloud was gone.

and the sky was clear again.

8. "We're....Stuck!"

somewhere,

deeply far from the planet you ~probably~ live on

there is a galactically large black hole

about 1000x the size of Earth
(the planet you ~probably~ live on)

which isn't actually that big for black holes
but is still
pretty monumental

it rests
in distortion

omitting a low and ominous hum

rolling through the thick vacuum of space

and, as is typical during the life of a black hole

a star was drawing close
a star that had been drifting towards this black hole,
unknowingly,
for the last ten thousand Earth years or so

and it was drifting to the point of closeness

where the gravitational pull of the black hole
would become so strong on this little star
that the star itself would be ripped apart

torn

and split.

shredded into oblivion

atom by atom.

until it is completely devoured and

*there would be absolutely no trace left
of the star.*

now,

there was no conversation that happened

between that black hole and that star

as this destruction occurred

however,

ahem

if a conversation were to have happened

i think it would have gone like this.

oh. hey!

oh! hey

i...uh
you're the thing
that's been pulling
me for so long?

y....yeah i think so

o....uh....okay!

wow, hey!
i've been wondering
a lot
what you were gonna
look like

oh haha, yeah i bet.
how do i hold up?

you're uhhhh
gosh, you're
really big!

oh
yeah
yeah....

:)

hey
i just uh....
(shit)

what's wrong?

i always --
sorry
i always start crying when --
and i can't speak very clearly once i --
(shit)

are you....
is everything
okay?

look, i just don't....
UGH!!!!

oh uh....

I JUST DONT WANNA SHRED YOU APART!!!

oh....hey

I DONT WANNA KEEP
FUCK
IM SO TIRED OF THIS
I DONT KNOW
I FEEL SO BAD FOR
WHAT I
UGH
AND YOU'RE
SHIT
YOU COULD HAVE HAD **LIFE** YOU KNOW?
AND I'M JUST
IM JUST HERE!!!!
STUCK IN SPACE TIME
TRAPPED, LIKE STUCK SO DEEP IN SPACE TIME
SO FUCKING FAT THAT I LITERALLY DESTROY EVERYTHING AROUND
ME
AND NOT EVEN AROUND ME
LIKE YOU WERENT CLOSE I BET
YOU FLEW ALL THE WAY OVER HERE FOR LIKE HOW LONG, RIGHT?

like
ten thousand years

TEN
JESUS, ten *thousand* years?????
and -- !

and, hey.

there was this
there was this asteroid
that flew
really close to me
and was engulfed
totally engulfed
in this
blue flame?
it was **really** cool
like *magical*
like once in a lifetime kind of
magical.

and
you know?
i just got
a lot of
time....

which is really valuable!
you know?
to think....
and
reflect
on what i knew
and what i thought
and *how* i thought
and
i don't know....
i just like,
got to be present.

that sounds corny

but it was *really* fun
and also,
yeah. boring
scary, totally
but....
i just got to a good place about things
i'm not worried.

but...

hang on,
i'm not done

like
i just kinda
got to be pulled down
a river
for like
so long
and it was
slow
like, gentle
this just
gentle tug?
for like
SO long,
you know?

it was sweet.
this constant tug....
it was really soft
and i kinda fell in love with it.
the tug
i don't know if that means
i fell in love with you
but.

i don't know
this just feels....
obvious?
right? i don't know....

like for SO long i didn't know
i couldn't even FATHOM what was
pulling me...
thought for a while
that there might not even be
anything....pulling me

that i was just like,

floating on my own....
 like i was like....
 broken or something
 god.....

but no!
 no!!
 it was
 you're a **black hole!**
 that's so cool!!
 look at you!!
 it just makes sense.

and i get to meet you?!
 i get to actually **have** like,
 an answer?!?!?

to this question i've had for like, pshh
 for forever?

that's so cool.
 that's **so** cool....

*and then
 the star was close enough
 that its matter started being lifted
 from its surface*

*and the planet really felt it
 felt the transition.*

*and,
 it made a lot of sense*

*and
 the black hole
 wished more than anything else
 that it didn't feel like it made sense*

*but it did feel like it make sense.
 made so much sense to them both.*

and the planet was consumed.

fallen into the black hole's weight.

*and the black hole's hum
took over the vacuum once again.*

*and the black hole
cried
with a lot of tension
and self-hatred
and confusion
and love
but mostly grief*

*because it had destroyed
this fuckin' planet!
you know?*

but.....

*well....
okay okay, now this is just **me** speaking
like, miles
this is just miles now*

*okay....so
what's that law?....*

that matter....

cannot be created or....

destroyed? right?

well....

then....

doesn't that mean....

somewhere in there....

*somewhere **in***

this grief-stricken black hole

idk, maybe even in its grief?

doesn't the planet have to be in there somehow?

it like,

CAN'T be gone....

even if it is just....

***in** the black hole's grief....*

can grief maybe....

carry with it....

some sort of

....life?

9. He says he keeps the lights off to save power, but....

okay.....i'm ready now.

the 92 year old white man
uttered this
while sat on the side of his bed.

he had arthritis
and a broken rib that was healing very slowly.

he had a memory that was fading
and an enthusiasm that was all but dust.

....most importantly, though
he had on a birthday hat

one of those plastic cone birthday hats
one with a thin string that wrapped around his chin
which, to his old skin,
felt a lot like razor wire

and was opening him up
slowly,
to reveal some blood
some old blood

but he couldn't take the hat off with his fingers
because of his arthritis

and he couldn't ask one of his children
to take it off
because he'd forgotten their names.

(who were in the other room)

and he didn't want them to know
he'd forgotten their names
so he just made
some joke about how he
was going to wear the hat forever
and then he closed the door to his large bedroom

and sat
in silence
and embarrassment.
alone
and in pain.
confused.
talking to a god he didn't believe in
telling them,

i'm ready to die now.

and the silence that followed
this request
was so deafening
and so unsurprising
and yet still so heart-breaking

and the man,
 who has a name
 but who can't remember it right now

could remember so many times in his life
where he felt jovial
and excited
and even,
in the times when he *had* felt suffering
that he also felt some
complicated **combination** of feelings
during those moments
 grief mixed with love
 heartbreak mixed with new life
 confusion mixed with rage
so much complex feeling.

but now
he felt....

so....

plain?

so **plainly** sad....

so **plainly** sorrowful.

*why....why would any sort of god let something this pitiful
even exist?*

he said those words out loud.
and he meant them.
asked them genuinely.

*isn't something....this....ugh, my god
pathetic?
shouldn't something this pitiful
be taken out?
....you clean stains off the bathroom tiles, don't you?
you wash clothes when there's some wretched smell, don't you?*

and
then
the only sound in the room was the ceiling fan

he wanted to be dead.
so badly
he wanted to be dead.

*you think it'll get **better** than this?*

he was mad now.
he was starting to cry.
he was scared now.

*you think it'll **turn around** after this???*

i'm done!

it's over for me

*....it's been over for so long
for me*

sigh

and....
outside the nameless man's room
were his 4 children
Marcy, Deborah, Wolf, and Lee
with *their* collective 6 children
Kristen, Mako, Hue, Lily, Florence, and Keenan
who sat in front of an indoor fire
holding glasses of wine and scotch
and sparkling apple cider

laughing
and complaining
in a whisper,
about their
“handful”
of a father.

which,
bonded them all
together

ravings which,
the grandkids collectively listened to
like a bedtime story

the complaints about this old
man
were their shared lullaby.

and this family lore,
would bind the 6 grandchildren together
for the rest of their lives
creating a real sense of
community
between them all.

so,
their grandfather’s self-identified pitifulness
and their parents’ disdain for it...
brought them all together?

and would be something
they would all use to
connect
until the nameless man died.

6 years
later....

.....

and even still,
even after that,
they would all
still
talk about
bond over
just how much of a handful
he could be.

was.

even still....

10. a poem.

*we we there,
at the beginning of everything.*

*we were there,
in the total darkness
and in the total darkness
we were there.*

*when each sound came into existence
each sight to see
each feeling to feel*

*we saw them roll in like a parade
some ecstatic goop
filling up the beaker of this existence*

*until it was full
of everything
everything there ever was
and everything there ever would be*

and we took none of it for granted.

*because we were there,
awake before the birds started chirping*

*awake to see every thing
wake up
for the very first time
with those baby blue bird eyes
that didn't know a single thing that was in store*

*and
we got to know what the sky sounded like*

when it was quiet.....

we were there to know what it was like

when it was quiet.....

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

■ ■ ■

time had passed.

*so much time had passed that all these stories now felt dated.
felt from another time.
a younger time.*

.....

*and the person came back....
to the garden!*

*yeaaaaah, the person who was in the garden?
who at one point was in it with two people but now....
mold over the eyes?
remember?
the two people who went blind with the mold
and then were just wandering around the garden forever?*

*well, yeah, they eventually left that garden
duh.*

*they definitely didn't think they ever would
but they did.*

*the mold on their eyes eventually started hardening over
and then started cracking,
chipping.*

*slowly, for sure
but after a while one of them could see just a bit again
and tore off the remaining chunks of mold stuck to their eyelids....*

*and then, yeah....
left....*

*and then,
some time later....
the other one of them started to see as well
saw that they were just wanderin' 'round*

*the same old garden,
and, tearing off the rest of their mold
they also...
after breathing for a while,
left.*

*and now...
after a long time,
one of them has come back
to the garden.*

jesus.

*the person muttered
as they stood at the foot of it all.*

*the garden had grown wildly.
had grown completely unhinged
the grass had a height minimum of 3 and a half feet tall
walking through it would mean completely submerging most of their body in the grass
and there were trees and vines that spiraled dozens of feet up into the sky
up so high that the person couldn't even see the tops
interlocking cross-sections of vegetation
with slices of shade and sunlight beaming throughout*

anything could be in there...

*and it sure sounded like that....
clicks and screeches and calls
and howls and growls and roars
all overlapping each other into some
riotous cacophony*

almost sounded like everything in the whole world was living within that garden.....

and the person looked down at where they were standing

and saw,

*each of their legs absolutely covered
in fucking mosquitos!!
there were like 15 on each leg!!!*

FUCK!

*the person jumped!!
violently swatting the bugs off of their body*

*which worked.
the blood-suckers flew off
back into their grassy fray*

*and then the person stood
a few feet further back now,
panting,
looking out into
this overgrown garden*

*and they
then looked out passed the garden
out at the horizon
which was now showing sunset
showing oranges and reds and a deep cool blue*

*and then they looked
back out into the garden*

*at the over....growth.....
which....
really seems to have taken on a life of its own....*

*bugs and beasts and bushes
.....an ecosystem*

*where did it all come from?
the mold?*

.....
*the two of them?
did the two of them somehow make this?*
.....

*the person sighed
didn't know,
and smiled to themselves.*

and

without much attachment, simply muttered

ah well.

turned around.

and walked back home.

.....
.....

thanks,

-m

;